

# *The Midland*

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## **I Am Running**

By HARTLEY BURR ALEXANDER

I am running a swift race:  
My body is painted with the symbols of swiftness;  
In my hair are the plumes of swift-flying birds;  
Tight-clasped, I hold in my hand a charm.

Who is he who is running beside me?  
His shadow is purple and very angry;  
His shadow is very swift;  
I dare not look about.

Something scarlet is bobbing before my eyes —  
Something which I should remember. . . .  
Is it a beautiful flower?  
Or is it . . . something which I should remember?

The goal is a gleaming mountain:  
Before I can touch it  
I must cross a dark canyon,  
I must cross the purple shadows of deep earth.

### Three Poems

By F. S. PUTNAM

#### TO REMEMBER

Yes, I can talk about it. . . . If I try.

The children were all away that night. We started  
Up to bed, I first with the lamp, and she behind.  
There in the house we'd lived in forty years,  
Going up the stairs like we had always done,  
Only the wind was howling more that night  
Across the bare fields, so we liked indoors.  
We'll never know what did it. All at once  
The lamp blew up. It smashed  
Around her and round me with blazing oil.  
We caught each other on the stairway, beat  
The flames, each other's clothes, and staggered  
burning

Down stairs and out the door. Oh God, her face!  
In all the agony, the worst her face!  
"Martha—" I said. Then I could only scream.  
But she could think. "We've got to get to Joe's,  
Andy," she said, "along the railroad track."  
"I can't," I said, "I can't. This burns! And you!"  
Her clothes were most burned off her. And her face  
So twisted up with pain I couldn't see.  
"We've got to go. Maybe, they'll save us yet.  
*Lean* on me, Andy." And she took my hand,  
And led me off. That walk was all a mile.  
I couldn't think, and so I leaned on her

Who oughta leaned on me. We both cried wild  
Because we couldn't help it. Burns and a wind  
And no shoes on our feet (we'd slipped them off,  
Down by the stove, after the evening dishes),  
And our feet were burned too and so the cinders  
Ground in, till they were just cinders and blood.  
And all about us was a funny light.  
I felt like it was hell. It was the house  
Burning behind us, but we didn't know.  
But her hand held me all the awful way.  
We left the track and got up to the house,  
And on the porch, and opened Joseph's door.  
Their house seemed like our world until they saw us.  
Then all the burning rushed around again.

Martha died next day. I wanted to.  
But after a while I could get up again.

Bitter about it?

No.

At first wild crazy.

But then I learned to think about just this:

Her holding me in all the agony,

Her leading me in all that bitter way.

## THE WILD CRABAPPLE TREE

Little wild crabapple tree,  
Thorny and leafless,  
You stand against the winter clouds,  
A twisted fantasy.

Each tiny branch of yours  
Is so slender and tilted,  
So sharply gray against the distant mauve,  
You seem alive and yet unchangeable.

Yet I know, — ah, I know, —  
Rolled small and tight within those thin-edged twigs,  
What gloriousness of rosy silken buds  
And April-misted blossoms and green leaves  
Lies furled. I know  
What clear and haunting fragrance will be flung  
Far down the spring.

My life is gray, too,  
Cold little tree.  
But who knows what is in my heart?

## PLUMS

I hunt for red plums in the long orchard grass.

How deep is the circle of peace when I pass  
The tangle of raspberry vines, where they run  
Through weeds, dusty-gold in the afternoon sun.  
The ring that the plum trees bend lightly around  
Is green dark and shadowy soft. On the ground  
The plums through their thickets of grass are ashine  
With color of fire and of rose and of wine,  
— The sweetness of summer. Far off in a row  
The tops of the elms by the hedge are curled slow  
By the touch of the wind. . . . It is a day  
Of perfume. . . . Love and loss seem far away.

Only the south wind and some stray bees pass,  
As I hunt for red plums in the long orchard grass.

## Searchlights

By NORINE WINTROWE

Nearer and nearer thrills the low, clear note  
That means the coming of the midnight boat,  
And lying here awake, I see the trees  
On the far shore — night-shrouded mysteries.  
The searchlight sweeps across them, up the sky  
And back to this side, like a monstrous eye.

It finds my home, and in this darkened room  
Flaring, illumines all the dusky gloom  
Of every corner, makes me wink my eyes —  
Then leaves me with my darkness and surprise.  
Majestically, slowly, through the night  
The boat moves on with its revealing light.

Now it has gone, here in the room alone  
I think how like that searchlight is to one  
Who with a strange, slow smile could penetrate  
Rooms in my soul I had thought closed to Fate —  
How, when that smile departed finally,  
Those rooms seemed darker than before to me.

## **A Prairie Symphony**

By IVAL McPEAK

When Paul Helmick had begun to come into his intimacies with the prairie, the experience had been vague and disturbing, a welling up in him of something that yielded him both ecstasy and discomfort, because as yet he had command of no adequate language.

The ecstasy and the discomfort had their beginnings sometime during the summer of his return from Boston, possibly on the July day when the men had worked late to finish the haying. All of the three hundred acres of the Helmick farm lay on the west side of the road, on a level expanse unbroken by a single hill. A windbreak of maples, planted three deep, guarded the house and the farm buildings on the north and west. Paul's team had been the last in the barn, and by the time he had fed it, his father and the hired man had gone to the house, where his aunt waited supper. Paul walked out of the barn, passed the machine shed, then came to a stop. Through openings in the dense leafage of the maples glowed pure flame. The trees were somberly etched against a wall of fire.

Forgetting supper for the time, he walked through a gate, through the windbreak of maples, and into the hayfield, now shorn to a level gray. Here the whole empire of space stretched out before him, on to its frontier of splendor in the west. Only on the prairie, he was sure, could there be such sunsets,

those far reaches of red and gold and purple flung half way around the world, unhampered by a huddle of hills. The yellow of his father's oats and wheat fields, the smooth green of the pasture land, and the more assertive green of the corn melted into distant tinted grays. A dull yellow road ran straight toward the village of red barns on the Hulbert place. The rumbling of an empty wagon, homeward bound, the whirl of birds' wings, and little pipings and twitterings in the maples back of him seemed only to stress the profundity of the silence that had come with the day's end.

He had been stirred by it all in a new way. He felt vaguely that it was trying to say something; it did mean something, surely. Bits of legend, fragments of poetry, irrelevant things — Valhalla, the Twilight of the Gods, the plain of Scamander, the temple of the Grail, — came and went; but they did not belong here. Music, too, — as he remembered it later, a brilliant play of strings and woodwinds with a solemn undertone in the basses; — but whether he had heard it then or had referred his later music to this moment, he was never able to tell. Perhaps his memory had been all the more confused by the call to supper that presently had come through the maples.

It must have been a few nights later, — for he remembered having been dead tired from shocking oats all day, — that he had gone over to Lynn Jackson's place to share some samples of winter wheat which had come down to the elder Helmick



from the State Agricultural College. A quarter mile east of the Helmicks', the prairie began to roll and became hillier as it approached the curves of the Hawkeye river. From the top of the first low swell the Jackson house and barns overlooked the country. He was starting back home, when, a few yards beyond the Jacksons' front gate, he paused to look at the prairie as it lay under the light of the full moon. The moon itself rode solitary, sharp cut, seemingly apart from the uncanny radiance it had laid over meadow land, corn and oats fields, and the roofs of houses and barns. It was a transfigured land; ancients had invested it. Even the maples around his father's buildings harbored a measure of the mystery and gloom of a vast old forest.

The transcendent beauty of it was oppressive. He breathed deeply and laboriously. At this time he probably did not try to fathom the cause of the oppression. There might have been an ill-defined necessity of doing something, saying something. Undoubtedly, here too was music, but this was before the time when he came to recognize it as the language that he was half consciously struggling for.

He had dealt with the language since childhood, although much of his creative talent had been developed clandestinely. His mother had led him through the first steps with the piano, and thereafter had taken him to Mound City for piano lessons with Miss Strickland and for violin with "Professor" Hummell, the best teachers the little prairie town afforded in the middle 90's. But, after her death

and the arrival of his aunt to keep house, his father, feeling that piano lessons were not for boys, dispensed with Miss Strickland's services, but allowed Paul to continue his violin lessons up to the time of his graduation from high school. Paul did not remonstrate against the loss of his piano lessons; at that time he was only ten years old, hardly at an age at which any feeling he might have had for the art would lead him to invite discipline. But he continued his habit of sitting at the piano and letting his fingers wander over the keyboard. When his father and aunt took notice, they thought he was playing from memory the things he had learned under Miss Strickland.

He played first violin in the high school orchestra at Mound City. It was Grimshaw, principal of the school and leader of the orchestra, who first sensed the quality and promise of what came from beneath the boy's fingers at the piano and got from him the admission that it was "his own." From Grimshaw he acquired his first notions of harmony and through him received fragmentary aid in carrying on his piano work. It was a slender opportunity, but Paul capitalized marvelously on it during these four years.

After Paul's graduation, his Uncle Lloyd prevailed on his father to let the boy live with him for a year in Boston. There Paul had teachers — piano, violin, harmony — who went a good way toward supplying the deficiencies of his tutelage under Miss Strickland, Hummell, and Grimshaw. They were

rigorous with him; he frequently chafed under their discipline; but he acknowledged the solidity of the foundation they were having him lay. At the end of the year his father called time on him, and he went back to Iowa in time to help with the haying.

Curiously enough, after his return he found that he was not altogether sorry to be back. He was prairie born and prairie bred; in the city and even in the Berkshire Hills he had missed the free open spaces. For the first time he took definite pleasure in the prospect of his coming proprietorship of the home acres. Yet he had regretted having to leave his Boston teachers, the concerts, and an agreeable circle of music students he had come to know. He was not yet conscious of the turmoil, the tug and pull, inside of him. The son of his father did his share of the farm work, but he himself had stopped on his way to supper to view the spacious prairie sunset, and had paused on the hill, held by the glamors of the full moon.

Throughout that summer he sensed other moods of the prairie: the land awakening under the clarity of the sunrise, dew mantled, telling him of those elder mornings when the prairie was an untamed sea of grass and flowers; the stuffy, somnolent silence of mid-afternoon, fields and meadows palpitating under the July and August sultriness; the nights of no moon, when the prairie was an illimitable tapestry of dimly defined shadows; and one day in latter August when the prairie steamed under a steady downpour of rain. He had been aware of

prairie colors and sounds and smells before, but it was only during this summer that he began to know the prairie as itself.

There was a vague musical quality in this new intimacy, but as yet the moods of the prairie were far from realizing themselves in the language in which he had been drilled by Miss Strickland, Hummell, Grimshaw, and his Boston teachers. At this period he composed none at all. The rigor of his formal training was still heavy upon him. The memory of having strained after melodies and harmonies, of having so often cut and polished the life out of them, was slow in lifting its weight.

All this time he underwent the physical toil of the farm. A sense of coming proprietorship carried him on with this without too much drudgery. Occasionally he saw Miss Strickland, Hummell, and Grimshaw, Grimshaw particularly, although their companionship soon began to fall short of expectation. Possibly because as yet he could more easily interpret his reactions to the prairie pictorially, he took as much, if not more pleasure in the company of young Gene Cramer. Gene's father was editor of the *Mound City Beacon*, and he had grudgingly allowed Gene one winter of lessons at the Minneapolis Institute of Arts. One night Paul went to Mound City to see Grimshaw, but on a sudden impulse turned his steps to the office of the *Beacon*, where Gene was setting up display ads. They climbed the tower of the high school building, and looked at the roofs of the town, gleaming steel gray in a half

moon. The two talked commonplaces, youthful commonplaces, but Paul felt that he would have been suffocated on that particular night by hearing Grimshaw talk about resolutions and chords of the sixth.

## II

At the beginning of September Paul and his father came to their first pointed disagreement. His father, who had considered Paul's year of music in Boston as a luxurious vacation, had planned on what he considered a neat balance between his son's business and cultural training: two years at the State University and two years at the State Agricultural College. Paul agreed to the agricultural finish: his stay in a numbered apartment in Boston had left him with due pride in his coming ownership, and he was not unmindful of the value of scientific training in conserving this heritage. But he had talked with Grimshaw who had told him of his alma mater, Malvern College, where the school of music ranked as competently as "arts and sciences," where spring music festivals with the college choral society and either the Chicago or Minneapolis symphony orchestra flourished with unbroken regularity. He stood out with his father for Malvern. So small a college had never entered into Helmick's plans for his son; Paul's preference seemed to him an ill considered whim. Neither father nor son could give a satisfying reason to the other for his stand. Paul finally won his case, in view of his promise to take the two years at the Agricultural College.

But his father would have been grieved if he could have glimpsed Paul's schedule at Malvern in its real proportions. Officially he was registered in Arts and Sciences, but the pianos at the School of Music and the pipe organ and the college orchestra knew him better.

And, at Malvern he found the one man he had needed — Carl Edstrom. In the college catalogue Edstrom was listed as professor of harmony and counterpoint. He had studied once under Romanyi, and a few who realized the worth of both men had often likened Edstrom's clairvoyance in the detection of creative talent to that of the more celebrated teacher. Pupils of his who had gone out from Malvern to win their way in larger fields carried away with them something that they found hard to define.

Physically, Edstrom was a gaunt, shambling fellow with curly gray hair and deep-set gray eyes. His talk was an onrush and scramble of words that left one with a curious exhilaration after hearing him. Good-fellowship glowed and twinkled in his gray eyes; it was of the sort that put everyone, even the most obtuse student, immediately at home with him.

From Edstrom Paul got vastly more than the curriculum afforded. Edstrom did add to his theoretical groundwork, but he also compelled Paul to discover the music that was in him, the music that had oppressed him when he had beheld the far flung sunsets, the flooding of the prairie with moonlight,

and had heard the steady drumming of the rain over wide spaces.

Thus it came about that during his first vacation from Malvern he began to realize the prairie through his own language. Lights and shadows, rain and wind, became articulate. At first the voices were confused, but later they grew musically more insistent and authentic. There were rare moments when the prairie — all this middle empire of open spaces — belonged to him, because the music that came out of it was his music. He was growing into a regional consciousness of his Middle West. And, out of this consciousness arose the desire to write a prairie symphony, one work which should catch up and give adequately to the world something of the more intimate sensibilities, the deeper soul, of the prairie. Although in his better moments he felt altogether capable of doing this ultimately, there was nothing of conceit in the desire, the urge was spontaneous, single-minded. In moments of the greatest exaltation the work moved before him in a vague and glorious entirety.

For a time, when the wonder of the prairie music was first upon him, he did little more than to revel in the poignant pleasure of it, and only a fragment now and then found its way into manuscript. Even after he had brought himself to make a business of recapturing and transcribing the music at the piano, he allowed himself to be satisfied with tonal snapshots, fragments of ideas, undeveloped, crude. He had the youth's tendency for waiting on

spontaneity in workmanship as well as in inspiration.

But during his second year with Edstrom and his second summer at home, he learned that the musical artist, like the photographer, must develop and retouch the product of a moment's spontaneity in order to make the finished picture. The prairie moods, fortunately, had a way of coming back to him, and much of their language he was putting down and interpreting in manuscripts, which he kept always under the cover of his piano bench. Along with a few lyrical things that Edstrom had insisted he should work on as a matter of training, but which he considered as so much play, he began to spend long hours on his prairie symphony. He kept at it even during his two years at the Agricultural College.

He needed vastly more training, of course, vastly more musical experience; he did not realize how unequal was his preparation to the achievement of such a work. Edstrom, in a measure, had known it, but to Edstrom it was a crime to dampen enthusiasm. He preferred rather to err on the side of freedom, abandon, letting the rarely endowed work out their own artistic salvation without too much interference. Also, he had been a trifle nonplussed by so unique a genius as Paul's. He had feared to cast doubt on the possibility of Paul's working out a prairie symphony: things more impossibly ambitious than that had been done.

And, although Paul was encountering undreamed-



of difficulties, perplexities, and disappointments in the undertaking, he went on shaping and reshaping the work. Fragments — huge molten fragments — were cast up, molded, chiseled, dissolved, pieced together, cast away. The symphony grew awkwardly, splendidly; grew with the beholding again and again of sunrises and sunsets, of moon-flooded nights; grew out of the colors and smells and the animation of seeding time, out of the white loneliness of winter days. It grew during his second year at the Agricultural College, up to the summer that he returned home to take up a suddenly increased share of responsibility on the farm. His father's health was failing; he was anxious that Paul be ready at any time to come into his heritage.

### III

It was not until his discovery of Teresa that Paul was really brought to face the conflict which had been going on in him all the time. Teresa was the daughter of Lynn Jackson, a quiet, capable, forceful girl, who did not take her four years at the State University too seriously. But she lived just across the road from him; Paul had not been looking for romance so near home. After a turbulent series of infatuations, disillusionments, and disappointments with girls in Mound City, Boston, and Malvern, he was, however, quite ready for a woman like Teresa. And that summer he saw for the first time that she was beautiful and desirable.

Secretly she had always liked him a bit more than the others, and in her he found a most satisfying quality of response. She had known him from childhood; it was easy for her to understand his quick alternations of light and shade, his high and low moods. She knew when to humor him, when to dominate, when to cling. Her appreciation of his symphony was unaffected; he believed that she came as near to entering with him into the intimacy of the prairie as any human being could. Although she possessed no creative ability and added no new ideas to his, her responsiveness gave him a new confidence in his own ideas.

It was his desire for Teresa that made him realize the struggle between his artistic and economic heritages. It was not a rebellion against his father's desire for him to carry on with the farm. He took pride in these three hundred acres and in the opportunity to help in building up this Middle Empire, as he liked to think of it. It was no mean mission to be one of the shapers of its future. But, on the other hand, might he not do this better by devoting himself entirely to the making of its music? He discovered, though, that he had little notion as to opportunities and procedure in following music as a career; he had not concerned himself before over the vocational aspect of his art. Taking care of the farm was a tangible job, — in a way, laid out for him; the other course was beset with mystery and uncertainty. And now that he was intending to ask Teresa to marry him, the problem demanded an early solution.

He thought of writing to Edstrom, then abandoned the notion. Edstrom, he felt, was too single-minded in his devotion to the art, too naïvely enthusiastic, to see anyone through such a complication.

This practical worry had the effect of dulling him for a time to the manifestations of the prairie soul. July and August were sweltering days of corn ploughing, haying, and harvesting, of indecision and perplexity, tempered only by the occasional insistence of the music he had already created, and by evenings of sobered enjoyment with Teresa.

#### IV

Threshing came early that year, two half days in the first week of August. Paul was glad that his job was hauling bundles from the field, for it had put him in the way of knowing the prairie in a new mood.

Out in the far end of the oats field, the hum of the threshing machine came to him as a muted organ tone played by the cellos in an orchestra. The sound of the humming would be broken when he drove the horses forward to the next shock. But he no longer needed the physical sound to carry on the mood which it had first given him, for already it was translating itself into harmonies that marched on with greater precision and clarity as the idea took him in hand. His fingers, impatient to recapture the harmonies at his piano, were sweating and slipping on the fork handle as he pitched the bundles into the rack.

If he had stopped to analyze the mood that had come out of the distant hum of the threshing machine, he would probably have thought of it as the prairie exulting in enterprise, crying aloud how it was feeding the world, how it was building homes, rearing towns, and creating industries, — the new prairie, making history and dreaming dreams, exulting in the promise of the greater fruitages — races of poets, philosophers, and artists who would fashion stuff to outlive the corn and hogs. It was a mood less elemental than the others for which he was finding speech, but to him it possessed a quality of climax that would make it come fittingly toward the end of the entire symphony.

The music dominated him all during the mechanical job of lifting bundles on the load. Mechanically, too, he gave occasional guidance to the horses by pulling with his fork at the lines that were fastened around the two front stakes of the rack. After a time the rack was filled, and he was driving down the narrow dusty lane that lay between the oats and corn fields. As he neared the scene of the threshing, the organ tone of the machine gave way to a bumping, snarling boom, and the muffled chug of the "steamer" came to his ears. He drew up alongside the carrier; one of the crew jumped into the rack, and the two forked bundles feverishly into the separator.

Out in the field again for another load, where the boom of the threshing machine was once more subdued to a cello-like hum, he determinedly conjured

up the same mood and in his mind recaptured the music. He was surprised and exultant that, after the barrenness of the last two months, he had so well succeeded in conserving these new harmonies.

He threw the last bundle on the rack, and leaned for a few minutes on the fork handle, allowing the pure joy of achievement to well up within him. A September mildness had tempered the August heat. A fitful breeze fingered its way among the leaves and tassels of the cornfield to the south and brought back to him the faintest odor of the rankness of growing corn. A mile to the east, the white house and the red barns of the Jackson place were sunning themselves. He felt now that it would be easy to talk everything over with Teresa; this one bit of achievement had somehow put a different face on the matter, even if it had not actually clarified his perplexities. The crew would be staying at his father's house that night; he could not work on his music anyway; he would go over and see Teresa. He jumped on his load and drove back to the threshing machine, where the carrier had run empty for a full two minutes on account of his delay.

That evening after supper he was about to slip away, but he unwisely tried to go by the front door, where the threshers were sitting out on the porch smoking their pipes.

"Play us something," the engineer called out to him. "We can hear you out here."

He was impatient to get to Teresa and he disliked the idea of playing through windows. He tried to

beg off: he didn't play well; it had been so long since he had practiced.

"Well, give us something on the fiddle, then," persisted the engineer. "I like that best, anyway."

Paul hesitated, seeking words for another denial.

"Guess, after all, he's a lot better on the piano," volunteered his father unexpectedly from the far end of the porch. "He always took more to that, in spite of all I could do."

Paul was surprised, but relieved beyond measure at this. There had been little talk between father and son over his musical waywardness. Paul had never been able to interpret his father's silence; and now in this most offhand way his father had snapped the long tension of misunderstanding. To Paul it was clear now that, in his father's eyes, his music was simply the boy in him, and in his father's voice he read a tolerance of the boy's whims, with a bit of pride, after all. The man in him would carry on with the farm.

Paul went into the living room and played the less involved things from Chopin, Schumann, MacDowell, Nevin. He had not intended to play anything else, but desire slipped through his fingers, and he caught himself going over his exultant harmonies of the mood that had come to him out in the oats field. Then he stopped, and before anyone had asked him what the music was, he had got himself away down the front steps.

Again the moon was full; his path up the slope to the Jackson place was well lighted. He had never

felt quite so humanly satisfied before. His problem was no nearer solution, but he was taking pleasure in the fact of his life holding so overflowing a measure of interests that problems did demand solution.

But he found it hard to talk the matter over with Teresa. Putting the alternative so consciously involved him somehow in setting a high estimate on his musical future. The seriousness of his perplexities crumbled under his awkward handling of them. For a few moments after he had posed the question, Teresa was silent. They were sitting out on the broad slope of the lawn, in a space clear of shrubs and trees, where the moonlight had full play. He was wondering whether she had really understood, after all, or whether she doubted the value of what he had done and was thinking of something to say that would be noncommittal and not wound him.

"Why not do both?" she finally asked him. "Live the life of the prairie, do its work, and put it into your music. Must there be two roads — diverging? Maybe they lie together."

And because she had said it, he believed for a time that here was a way out. How could one, after all, interpret the prairie, unless he were living its life and doing its work? He would carry on with the farm, and — Teresa would help him. He looked at her now, and all perplexity and ambition and conflict melted into this one desire.

"But, Teresa," he said, "what I want to know is this: will you go with me, — whichever road it is?"

He was sorry for a moment that he had let himself

say the words so abruptly: he did not at first understand the language of the look that illumined her face.

"Of course, Paul."

They made no more allusion that night to his music until he had risen to go. The moon was riding on the last quarter of its journey, sharp, detached from its own radiance, just as he had seen it the night he had brought the wheat samples to his father.

"There is my *Adagio*," he said to her, "you remember?"

"Yes; I like it the best of all."

This was the portion of his symphony that had given him the most satisfaction and had undergone the least change. In elusively weird harmonies he had captured something of the glamor of a moonlit prairie night. They were silent a while before this transfigured land.

For several weeks, the wonder and the joy and the mystery of Teresa made his old problem seem unreal. They changed his music; he worked on a *romanza*, on some songs, but not for long at a time. The spontaneity and the fullness of life itself were sufficient for the time.

With October, though, his father's health failed rapidly, and the sense of coming responsibility once more began to rest heavy on him. As the days went on with potato digging, apple picking, and corn husking, the old alternative came back to him with uncompromising stubbornness. He dipped into a life of Beethoven, noting with particular eagerness



the account of the Sixth Symphony. The disparity of the composer's life and methods with his own discouraged him. How could he manage a three hundred acre farm and do all this, out on the prairie, more than three hundred miles from the nearest musical center? Teresa's easy solution ceased to satisfy; but he did not tell her so.

The prairie was rich with the colors and the fruitage of autumn. In spite of immediate worries and handicaps, the old urge to speak the language was strong again. He put in some long evenings at the piano, writing scores and trying certain solo parts on the violin. All that he had written was in piano score, at least; on other pages he had added suggestions for horns or for strings or for woodwinds, while still other pages bore full orchestrations. A new vision of the completed work kept him indefatigably at it for a time. Then his father grew suddenly worse, and the music was put away.

## V

One evening he was surprised to find a note from Edstrom in the mail box. It ran on exuberantly, as if it were only one in an active correspondence. One paragraph Paul read twice:

"Victor Romanyi is back in Chicago," Edstrom wrote. "He has revived his school of harmony and composition and several of the old group are with him again. I suppose you have read all about it in the musical journals. The Middle West — America — is fortunate. A great opportunity for you; I'll

give you a letter if you wish. There is no better man to tell you how to make the most out of your symphony. But — don't delay; Romanyi may be in London or Budapest in another six months, and — his school won't accommodate many students. He goes up and down the earth, but wherever he goes he kindles fires that keep on burning."

Edstrom, Paul remembered, had been one of the "old group," at the time of Romanyi's first sojourn in Chicago. With Edstrom he had come to feel the musician's peculiar reverence for a man of Romanyi's position: there were a half dozen composers, former pupils of Romanyi, in almost as many different lands, whose names were better known than that of their master. Paul had barely glanced at the current number of his musical journal; he had not known that Romanyi was in America. And now he was in Chicago, within a half day's train ride!

That night he bore the news to Teresa. She urged him to go to Chicago and show Romanyi what he had done. Enthusiasm grew with their talking of possibilities; for a little time their dreams transcended the worries that lay so close at hand. The next day Paul wrote to Edstrom, and a few days later received in reply a letter of introduction to Romanyi with directions for finding his school in Chicago.

An excuse for going to Chicago came a week later with two car loads of cattle of which Helmick wished particular care taken. Paul went into Chicago on a stock pass, carrying a change of clothes in his suit

case. On his arrival, he lost no time in seeking out the building that housed Romanyi's school. He was surprised and a trifle disappointed to find a dingy, three story brick structure squeezed between its taller and more pretentious neighbors. He thought at first he might be mistaken, but the number and a neatly lettered sign on the door reassured him.

The inconspicuousness of the building had a counterpart in the slight and unpretentious figure of Romanyi himself. As he entered the composer's studio, his first impression was that of the little, iron-gray moustached man submerged by the fixtures of the room, — the piano, the cabinets and cases of music, his desk. But with his first spoken words, the little man came to life and pleasantly dominated the room.

Paul played over his symphony, indicated particular orchestrations in places, and as he grew more at ease, sketched out uncompleted portions. Romanyi listened through it all, then took the manuscript and looked over certain pages with quick appraising glances.

"Splendid material here," Romanyi said, with finely tempered approval.

Paul colored a little under this, but he felt a bit of secret uneasiness over the word "material."

"It is full of crudities, of course," Romanyi went on. "You have attempted something beyond your powers; you need — oh, you need much more training."

He ran his fingers over one page meditatively.

"Most of the *Adagio* is — not bad," Romanyi told him. "But you should try smaller things first; study, study, compose and compose, — training and theory — you can't get enough of them."

Romanyi had rolled the manuscript up and was gesturing with it.

"That's the trouble with you Americans. You want to paint a Madonna, or build a cathedral or compose a symphony before you learn how. You don't lay foundations deep enough; you are in too great a hurry." He was walking in a little circle near the piano and talking to no one in particular.

Then he stopped and looked down at Paul.

"We're a little crowded, but — I should like to have you study here," he said more quietly. "Of course, I should have to work with you for a time to be able to tell you more of your possibilities."

Then Paul explained to Romanyi about his father, the farm, the conflict of futures. But as he talked, he felt foolish at telling all this to Romanyi — Romanyi, of all people! In the presence of this man, in these surroundings, the problem seemed curiously remote.

"Of course," Romanyi decreed briefly, "you can't farm and write symphonies, that is, good symphonies. One should do the thing that he can do best."

Romanyi showed him through the school. Presently, in the studios and the practice rooms and the concert hall, Paul felt a reaction against the routine, — the classes, the keeping of records, schedules, grading, filing, — formal, dead things. Romanyi

had teachers under him; these things, no doubt, had to be. But it was all alien to the open spaces, with their lights and shadows and moods and mysteries.

He thanked Romanyi, and went back to his hotel, thinking all the way of the things he had forgotten to ask Romanyi, — questions regarding his methods of working on the symphony, the cost of lessons at the school, opportunities in music as a career.

At the hotel a telegram from his aunt awaited him. His father was very low; he must hurry back. He took the next train for the west, and arrived home in time to have two hours with his father. Most of the time his father was unconscious; there was little talk between them. Right at the last, though, Paul heard a mumble of words and bent his head down to listen.

"Maybe you'd better — get Hicks to build the — new cattle shed."

There was a little silence, and then these were the last words Paul heard his father say:

"I don't know, though. Maybe Allison — I — I'll leave it to you. . . . Paul . . . ."

Paul felt closely bound to his heritage.

## VI

To the neighborhood it was quite the normal and customary sort of change that Paul should marry Teresa Jackson, and that she should relieve his aunt as keeper of the Helmick household. The neighborhood never did know, of course, the conflict of desires and ambitions that went with this change: on

the one hand, the joy of having Teresa at the home place, the sense of proprietorship, the augurs of prosperity; yet, with all this, the fear of having missed a high goal, of having forfeited the chance to do the one thing he could do well. But whatever turmoil might be working within him, he did not let it interfere with the fall plowing.

Winter came on, though, with more leisure. The edge of Romanyi's uncompromising edict was being dulled; Teresa's reassurances had something to do with this. One evening he pulled out his manuscript from the piano bench, and began to remedy some of the faults that Romanyi had pointed out. But the next evening there was a meeting of the Greenbrier Township Farmer's Club, and the following night he had to put on the storm windows.

Soon, also, with ownership and control a fact, he came to feel himself in competition with the neighbors. They were watching him closely, he knew; they were waiting to see if the younger Helmick, with all of his education, would make the farm pay out as well as his father did. He made a study of the farm, calculating on its utmost possibilities with all the science and business sense at his command.

The morning of the first deep snow he stepped outside and beheld a white waste that stretched unendingly beyond the gray wall of the maples,—a vast Siberian plain, the prairie in cheerless mood. More than ever before, this mood was now finding expression; the music for it came with new clarity and insistence. If he could only recapture at the

piano these sweeping minor harmonies and the forlorn little melody that wandered through them! But the mental domination of responsibility, rather than the physical effort, was not leaving his mind free for the crystallizing of impressions. When he returned to the piano and violin that night, much of the music had eluded him. He went to bed with heavy heart, feeling unutterably discouraged.

Two or three later attempts that winter met with little more success. Then, with the material that he did succeed in transcribing, he found himself tampering with the symphony, rearranging it, trying to fill in the gaps with music laboriously ground out.

He wrote some Christmas music for programs in Mound City and at the Greenbrier school. At times, he felt that this, after all, was the utmost of which he was really capable. Gloomy and abstract speculation as to his method of working on his music would be followed by a moment of exaltation when the splendor of some of his earlier harmonies would beat in upon him. Gradually, though, he came to put less store by these alternations of high and low mood; tangible worries were settling him down.

The months that went into years brought respectable prosperity to the Helmick farm; Paul was carrying on creditably. The Experiment Station of the Agricultural College commissioned him to plant two demonstration plots. Another year he was elected county supervisor. He took pride in community building; if it had not been for his efforts, the Greenbrier Community House would have been

delayed a decade. All this time he was growing into a substantial physical copy of his father. He was filling out in flesh, and as lines came into his face, they set it into the features of old Helmick.

A boy, then a girl, then another boy came, bringing new responsibilities, the most satisfying he had ever known. He caught himself hoping that one of the boys, at least, would carry on with the farm, and this hope grew into a picture of generation after generation of Helmicks conserving the ancestral flavor of the place, achieving wholesome American prosperity.

For months at a time the manuscript of the symphony, as well as the unfinished lyrical things, lay undisturbed. One autumn day, though, on a little urging from his wife, he got out the symphony. It was a windy day in early November. The corn was husked, the fall ploughing done, the apples all in the cellar. There was a pleasant day's interval in the farm work. The clean, dry wind, the race of the clouds over the sky, and the gathered-in harvests gave him a zest for his music.

He worked unceasingly through most of the day, reshaping here, rearranging there, pruning and adding and recoloring. Fragments were expanded and fitted into the general form. He added scores for the different instruments. Toward night a rain-storm arose and settled into a steady downpour. He worked far into the night, sometimes stopping to live over the times when the moods had come to him with their first authentic voices. Here was the *Andante*, the music that had spoken to him out of the



sunset splendors and out of the starless nights when the prairie was all blackness and shadow; the *Adagio*, the land dreaming under the glamour of the full moon. Moods, gay and heavy, dark and light, and strenuous, ran through the other two movements. Never had he toiled over this music when the mere workmanship of it so fascinated him.

But his working late was too great a revolution in his habits. The next morning he felt dead tired, irritable, weak. He looked at the result of his toil; it was all wrong; he threw the manuscript back into the piano bench.

Two days later he read in a Chicago paper that Romanyi's school of harmony and composition had discontinued. Romanyi had had some trouble with his teachers; there were financial difficulties. Romanyi was leaving for Berlin. He could not understand the abysmal depths of depression into which this news cast him. He felt a vague parallelism between this and something that was going on within him.

The next summer he barely pulled through a siege of typhoid fever. The following winter two of the children had diphtheria. He built a silo and a new cattle barn; he bought an extra forty acres of corn land to the north. He ran for the State Legislature and was defeated. Life brought more or less, just as it pleased. But through it all Paul and Teresa lived comfortably and contentedly. After ten years of married life, they had noticeably grown into each other; they had for each other the substantial, home-

spun love that does not alter with life pulling at it this way and that.

But the prairie moods and their music, in so far as they stayed with him, had taken on the quality of reminiscence; they were remote things. A red sky in the west was a sign of fair weather for the morrow; rainy days were rainy days for doing inside jobs. At times he would finger over the pages of the manuscript with the vague notion that he would be getting at it again. Meanwhile he traded in his four cylinder automobile on a six, and won two blue ribbons on his cattle at the state fair.

## VII

On one unforgettable October afternoon he happened to be passing the mail box as the carrier drove by. He opened the box to look for personal letters. There was one addressed to him from Omaha; it was from Edstrom. He read it hastily, then read it again to make sure of what it told him. Edstrom was returning from a western lecture trip; he would go through Mound City; he wanted to avail himself of an invitation repeated many times when Paul was at Malvern. Would Paul wire him tomorrow at Des Moines, where his next lecture was scheduled?

Paul stood leaning against the box, the note held listlessly in his hand. About him spread the prairie, basking in the mellow sun of mid-autumn. The maples flamed yellow and red; the earth was glad for the harvests that were in. He listened, but all he heard was the crescendo purr of an approaching car,

the slamming of a door somewhere up in the house, his wife calling to one of the children. Then all sounds ceased for a moment. He listened again: somewhere the stirring of things half-heard, shifting and receding, broken up, — then silence even there.

Edstrom was coming . . . . Edstrom. Nothing had so thrown him back on the earlier years. . . . Before Edstrom had been Miss Strickland — she was an invalid in Florida now, so he had heard; Hummell, dead six years before; Grimshaw, teaching somewhere in Oklahoma. And Gene Cramer, like himself, was carrying on, editing the *Mound City Beacon*, getting more rotund every year. Romanyi — he was in Vienna or Paris or Budapest. All of them — except Gene — had so receded with the newer years that it seemed impossible that one of them should come here to him in the flesh. But Edstrom was coming. He was glad, but he wondered if, after the visit was over, he would not hold more tenaciously to the memory of him at Malvern. He was afraid of the distances that had come between them.

That evening as he entered the house, he heard from the direction of the living room sharp discords dancing up and down the piano keyboard, and he knew that three-year-old Bob was emulating nine-year-old Donald. Then the discords snapped into silence, and he heard Three-year-old's shrill yells. There was the quick tread of his wife's feet, the sound of parting belligerents, and Teresa came into the kitchen leading Bob, who was still in tears, but

pacified. The next moment Bob was riding his father's shoulder.

"Bob will insist on playing the piano and bothering Donald when he's practicing," said Teresa, wiping Bob's eyes and face with her handkerchief.

"You and Bob mustn't fight." Paul shook a finger at Bob.

"No, it isn't that. He hammers away just the same when there's nobody around. It just happens that Donald's in the way if Bob wants to play at his practice time. Bob takes after you, all right."

Paul accepted the better half of the double meaning, and a little tingle shot all over him. He hugged Bob so excessively tight that the round gray eyes widened in wonder.

"Now, Paderewski, Junior, you must get down. Dad's got to wash for supper." Bob came to the floor with a thump. "Oh, by the way, Teresa, Edstrom's coming — Thursday."

"Isn't that fine: I've always wanted to know him."

"And, if you're a good boy, Bob, I'll have Edstrom put his ear to those discords of yours. If they mean anything, we're going to start you on harmony and counterpoint right off." Then he laughed — at no one and to no one in particular.

Teresa, Junior, just then came through the kitchen door, looking as dirty as three pigs. There was a good quarter hour's delay before they all sat down to supper.

He met Edstrom at the station two days later, and

was surprised to find that the gaunt, kindly figure had aged so little. There was the same friendly sparkle in the eyes, the same onrush and scramble of vivid, colorful words,—the whole soul of him visibly meeting his old friend. Up to the end of supper that night, there was only the most incidental reference to music, and then it was Paul who really opened the way to the thing that was in the minds of both of them.

"My wife and I nearly came down for the spring festival at Malvern this year," he was telling Edstrom over the pumpkin pie and coffee, "but corn planting was late and we couldn't get away."

"The orchestra was unusually good this year," Edstrom said. "This time they played Tschaiowsky's Fourth Symphony, which I—well, I like just as well, at least, as the more popular Pathetique." He said nothing more for a second, then he looked up and spoke to Teresa:

"I was always so sorry that Paul didn't get to finish his symphony," he said, "but, good heavens! from what he showed me around your farm this afternoon, no wonder, no wonder!"

"Some inertia, too, I guess," Paul rejoined airily. "My wife tried to stir me up, and when *she* can't get results, you can be sure the case is impossible."

Edstrom laughed, and Paul marvelled at this man, at his abundant humanity and understanding. How he had misjudged him! The distances between them had vanished; in a sense, they were nearer each other than ever before.

After supper a fire was lighted in the fireplace of the living room, and Edstrom played. When Bob eluded his mother's vigilance and slammed a triumphant hand on the key board in the middle of a Chopin prelude, Edstrom showed the baby fingers over the tune of *Hey Diddle Diddle!* Then he insisted on having Donald show what he had learned in a year and a half of lessons.

After this, the children were bundled off to bed, and the three sat silent for a time in the fire illumined duskiness of the room. Presently, though, Edstrom made as if to lift up the cover of the bench.

"I suppose it is here, or has it gone to the attic?"

"It's in there," Paul replied. Paul arranged the pages for him; Teresa turned on the lights. Edstrom played through the pages of the manuscript, without comment, just letting all the moods of the prairie have their way.

In an onrush of memories, old days of spontaneity, color, the glow of achievement, came oppressively to Paul. Some of the earlier desire to speak the language flamed up and burned glowingly for a while. But, after Edstrom had ceased playing, he had the feeling of having listened to someone's else music; it had become curiously detached from him.

"My, you have added — you have done wonders with that since I heard it last," Edstrom was telling him. "It's too bad," he went on presently, "that it takes all of one man to run a farm. Why can't . . . ." A page of the music slipped to the floor. He bent over to pick it up. Then he got up and walked over in front of the fireplace. His hands folded back of him worked nervously.

"There is real material there," he said, "stuff that would — that is, if you abandoned the idea of the longer work — that would work up well into some good shorter things. Would you — I don't suppose you would — would you ever care to let someone — see what could be done — that way?"

Something inside of Paul flickered up and gave him an answer:

"No — at least not now. I would like to have you — maybe later. But I — I might . . . ."

"You should. It's — oh, it's assuredly worth working on. And what is done must not be lost; you must hand it on to — someone."

For a time Edstrom ignored the easy chair that had been placed for him at one end of the fireplace. Two — three times he paced up and down the room, then he faced the two:

"Paul, you've been pioneering. Of course, as a man, as a farmer, you have carried on the work of the older pioneers; that must be done if this region is to have a future. But in another field, you are — oh, I don't think I am overrating — you are one of the first. I mean, in the creation of sincere, interpretative music, the kind that will catch up our regional consciousness.

"It will not be sectional music. Everywhere there are Middle Wests; but when they talk words, they don't always get together. But — you see — if our Middle West speaks in this universal language, it will have a voice all over the earth; it will be understood as well in Moscow as in Chicago."

He paused meditatively for a moment, then sank into the chair that had been drawn up for him. Presently he went on in a more subdued voice, looking steadily into the fire:

"What you have done, Paul, makes it easier for me to believe that this music can be achieved. This uncompleted symphony, crude, perhaps, — a failure, in one sense of the word, should be — well, I would say, a sort of surety for our future Beethovens and Bachs and Tschaikowskys, — our other artists. . . .  
. . . Pioneering — yes — pioneering."

He ceased speaking, but to Paul there was something in his talk that went on, and he felt sure that it would go on for him throughout the rest of his days. Just now it held the room in silence; there was no talk for a little space.

Outside, though, the wind played a merry tune with the bare lilac bushes against the window panes. Then it lowered the voice of its shouting, and presently it was a long, low organ tone in the maples.

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### Contributors to This Issue

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